

WATCHED OVER BY OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

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Before Alzheimer's took his mind, my father always had a story or song for his children. I can remember him sitting in his big chair cradling my baby brother on his lap as his mellow voice filled the room with stories from his youth—everything from tending the cows with his cat draped over his shoulder to sliding down the red rock of Escalante, Utah, USA. Then, as my brother's eyes began to droop, the stories stopped, and the same cowboy lullaby began:

Close your sleepy eyes, my little buckaroo,

While your Heavenly Father watches over you.

Don't you know it's time for bed, another day is through.

So go to sleep, my little buckaroo.¹

Now my baby brother is a father, and my dad lies in a hospital bed in San Diego, California, USA. Though he sees palm trees, he thinks he is a boy turning irrigation water down the rows of corn, tomatoes, and green beans. But he is not. He is dying.

Day after day, my mother, brothers, and sister gather around his bed. My mother calls me at my home in the mountains of Utah, USA. She tells me that when she shows my dad old family photos, a smile comes across his sunken face. Other times, his brothers, long since dead, wander in and out of his mind and heart. She tries to get him to eat, but he refuses. He tells her that his brothers have caught some trout and he has to go take care of the horses before dinner.

One by one we have made peace with the knowledge that when he passes from this mortal life, our dad will be “taken home to that God who gave [us] life,” to “paradise, . . . where [he will] rest from all [his] troubles and from all care, and sorrow” (Alma 40:11–12).

I call my mother and she hands the phone to my dad. To my surprise, he begins to sing to me: “Close your sleepy eyes, my little buckaroo, while your Heavenly Father watches over you.”

I wonder if my dad really knows it's me. He probably doesn't, but this song comes as a gift drifting into my heart. I weep in gratitude for this tender mercy from my Heavenly Father and for His plan of salvation. Soon the lullaby is over, and I imagine my dad's eyes beginning to droop. The moment is gone, but I find hope in the knowledge that death is part of God's plan to bring us home to Him. I believe in God's plan and in His love for us as we pass from this life. I whisper, “Goodnight, Daddy. Go to sleep. Our Heavenly Father is watching over you.” ■

NOTE

1. See Jack Scholl and M. K. Jerome, “My Little Buckaroo” (1937).

